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LETTERS PATENT

ADD-DROP FILTER UTILIZING CHIRAL ELEMENTS

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CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present patent application claims priority from the commonly assigned U.S. provisional patent application S/N 60/254,815 entitled "Add-Drop Filter Utilizing Resonant Optical Activity" filed December 12, 2000.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to optical filters utilizing fiber Bragg grating type structures, and more particularly to an add-drop filter utilizing chiral elements capable of changing polarization angles of selected polarized signal components.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Add-drop filters have many industrial applications – for example in information processing, in telecommunication systems, and especially in optical fiber communication systems utilizing wavelength division multiplexing (WDM).

An add-drop filter enables a new signal to be added at a particular wavelength λ'_k to a fiber optic line carrying n signal channels over a band of wavelengths encompassing $\lambda_1 \dots \lambda_{k-1}$, λ_k , $\lambda_{k+1} \dots \lambda_n$, while an existing signal, λ_k is simultaneously dropped from the signal group. This functionality is essential in

telecommunication systems. Previously known add-drop filters are relatively complex devices that require several expensive components, such as polarization converters that not only increase the filter's cost but also add to its complexity.

5 Presently used add-drop filters are mostly based on fiber Bragg Gratings (FBGs). FBGs are typically manufactured through irradiating an optical fiber made from a UV-sensitive material with UV light using a pre-designed phase mask. Another prior-art approach to manufacturing fiber Bragg gratings involves irradiating a UV-sensitive optical fiber with two interfering UV laser beams.

10 However, the previously known FBGs are relatively expensive and difficult to manufacture. Some of the efficient modern add-drop filters provide better performance than older non-FBG filters, but because they utilize both FBGs and polarization converters, they are relatively expensive and complex and therefore difficult to fabricate.

15 It would thus be desirable to provide an add-drop filter utilizing a novel construction and inventive chiral elements that advantageously eliminates and replaces components required in previously known add-drop-filters while providing better performance and higher efficiency.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of a preferred embodiment of an add-drop filter of the present invention.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to an add-drop filter that utilizes resonant optical activity that enables a new signal to be added at a particular vacuum wavelength λ'_k to a fiber optic line carrying n signal channels over a band of 5 vacuum wavelengths encompassing $\lambda_1 \dots \lambda_{k-1}$, λ_k , $\lambda_{k+1} \dots \lambda_n$, while an existing signal, λ_k is simultaneously dropped from the signal group.

The inventive add-drop optical filter subtracts a drop signal from a target wavelength channel of a multi-channel input signal and adds an add signal into the target wavelength channel. The inventive add-drop optical filter includes an 10 input port for receiving the multi-channel input signal, the input signal comprising a plurality of input signals in a plurality of corresponding channels, and the drop signal in the target wavelength channel, an add port for delivering the add signal at the target wavelength to the input signal; a first polarization splitter, connected to the input port and to the add port, for splitting each of the input, 15 drop, and add signals into two corresponding input, drop, and add signal polarized components; a first chiral element for changing polarization of the add and drop signals at the target wavelength and for passing all signals at other wavelengths therethrough; a first line for delivering a first portion of the input, drop, and add signal polarized components to the first chiral element, such that 20 the input signal polarized components pass through the first chiral element, wherein polarization of the add and drop signal polarized components is changed; a second chiral element for changing polarization of the add and drop signals at the target wavelength and for passing all signals at other wavelengths therethrough; a second line for delivering a second portion of the input, drop, and

- add signal polarized components to the second chiral element, such that the input signal polarized components pass through the second chiral element, wherein polarization of the add and drop signal polarized components is changed; an output port for transmitting, to a first external destination, an output
5 signal comprising a plurality of input signals in a plurality of corresponding channels and the add signal in the target wavelength channel; a drop port for transmitting the drop signal in the target wavelength channel to a second external destination; and a second polarization splitter, connected to the first and second lines and to the output and drop ports, for directing the input and add
10 signal polarized components to the output port and for directing the drop signal polarized components to the drop port.

Other objects and features of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. It is to be understood, however, that the drawings are
15 designed solely for purposes of illustration and not as a definition of the limits of the invention, for which reference should be made to the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The essence of the inventive add-drop filter involves utilization of novel chiral elements in the filter to provide 90% polarization rotation for signal components at a selected wavelength. Chiral elements, such as chiral optical fibers or cholesteric liquid crystal (CLC) structures, are either known in the art (e.g. CLCs) or are novel and described in greater detail in co-pending commonly assigned patent applications (e.g. chiral fibers) referred to below.

Preferably, the pitch of a chiral element utilized in the inventive add-drop filter is approximately equal to the particular add/drop signal wavelength λ_k divided by the effective refractive index of the chiral element at that wavelength (i.e. the pitch should generally equal to the wavelength inside the element). The speed of signal propagation in the chiral element is different for right and left circularly polarized light only at the particular wavelength λ_k . Preferably, the length of each chiral element is chosen to have 90° polarization rotation at the wavelength λ_k . As a result, certain polarized components are passed through the chiral elements unchanged while λ_k and λ'_k have their polarization changed by 90° as they pass through.

Any chiral element having the above-described properties may be utilized in the inventive add-drop filter. The chiral elements may be produced and/or configured using one or more of the following exemplary techniques as a matter of design choice without departing from the spirit of the invention:

1) A chiral element may be produced by twisting one or more heated optical fibers as disclosed in the co-pending commonly assigned U.S. patent application entitled: "APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR MANUFACTURING

PERIODIC GRATING OPTICAL FIBERS", and in the co-pending commonly assigned U.S. provisional patent applications entitled "HELICAL FIBER BRAGG GRATING", and "APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR FABRICATING HELICAL FIBER BRAGG GRATINGS", which are all hereby incorporated by reference in
5 their entirety;

2) A chiral element may be produced by twisting the cladding of an optical fiber about its straight unmodified core;

3) A chiral element may be produced by imposing modulation of the effective refractive index in an optical fiber by writing a single or a double helix
10 pattern on the external surface of the fiber. For example, a periodic structure, such as a groove may be formed on its surface. This may be accomplished via laser ablation or by the addition of dielectric material in a helix on the outside of the fiber. The helical dielectric about the fiber can also be deposited and subsequently developed. These techniques are disclosed in the above-
15 incorporated provisional patent applications "HELICAL FIBER BRAGG GRATING", and "APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR FABRICATING HELICAL FIBER BRAGG GRATINGS";

4) Another way of producing a chiral element involves imposing a helical or a double helical modulation of the refractive index at the core of an optical
20 fiber as disclosed in the co-pending commonly assigned U.S. patent application entitled: "APPARATUS AND METHOD OF MANUFACTURING CHIRAL FIBER BRAGG GRATINGS"; and

5) The chiral element may be composed of a substance having an inherent chiral structure. For example, the chiral element may be one or more cholesteric liquid crystal layers.

It should be noted that chiral structures typically include a reflection stop
5 band -- a range of wavelengths at which light traveling through the chiral structure is reflected. Preferably, the reflection in chiral structures utilized in the add-drop filter of the present invention is minimized to allow maximum possible transmission.

Referring now to FIG. 1, an inventive add-drop filter 10 is shown. An input
10 signal 100 containing n channels (including the channel to be dropped at the wavelength λ_k) enters into the add-drop filter 10 through an input port 12 and is divided into two parts with different polarization – one perpendicular to the plane of incidence (hereinafter “PPI” denoted by a circle in FIG. 1) and one in the plane of incidence hereinafter “IPI” denoted by an arrow in FIG. 1) by a first polarization
15 splitter 16 that splits unpolarized light into two polarized components. The first polarization splitter 16 also passes IPI polarized signals and deflects PPI polarized signals in a manner shown in FIG. 1. The polarization splitter 16 may be any device well known in the art that is capable of splitting unpolarized light into two polarized components.

20 The differently polarized signal components then proceed along optical fibers 18, 20 to respective chiral elements 22 and 24. A signal λ'_k to be added at the wavelength λ_k enters the add-drop filter 10 through an add port 14 and is also divided into IPI and PPI polarized components by the first polarization splitter 16,

where the two λ'_k components also proceed along the fibers 18, 20 to respective chiral elements 22 and 24.

The speed of propagation in each of the chiral elements 22, 24 is different for right and left circularly polarized light only at the particular wavelength λ_k .

- 5 Preferably, the length of each chiral element 22, 24 is chosen to induce 90° polarization rotation at the wavelength λ_k . As a result, λ_i polarized components are passed through the chiral elements 22, 24 to an output port 30 without change in their polarization, while λ_k and λ'_k have their IPI and PPI polarization components changed by 90° as they pass through. After having its IPI polarized
10 component pass through a second polarization splitter 28 (of similar design to the first polarization splitter 16), and its PPI component arriving via the fiber 18 to be deflected by the second polarization splitter 28, the λ'_k signal is directed to the output port 30 to form the full output signal 102. At the same time, the PPI component of the λ_k signal arrives via the fiber 20 and is deflected by the second
15 polarization splitter 28 into a drop port 26; while the IPI component of the λ_k signal arrives via the fiber 18 and is passed by the second polarization splitter 28 into the drop port 26 such that the entire λ_k signal (consisting of the IPI and PPI components) is dropped into the drop port 26. Thus, the inventive add-drop filter
10 advantageously substitutes the λ'_k signal for the λ_k signal. The use of the
20 novel chiral elements 20, 22 simplifies the construction of the inventive add-drop filter 10, improves its efficiency and reduces its manufacturing cost.

Thus, while there have been shown and described and pointed out fundamental novel features of the invention as applied to preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood that various omissions and substitutions and

changes in the form and details of the devices and methods illustrated, and in their operation, may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit of the invention. For example, it is expressly intended that all combinations of those elements and/or method steps which perform substantially 5 the same function in substantially the same way to achieve the same results are within the scope of the invention. It is the intention, therefore, to be limited only as indicated by the scope of the claims appended hereto.

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